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STATE FOR SCA/INS, USPACOM FOR FPA

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SUBJECT: TAMIL LEADER REFLECTS ON THE CONFLICT, THE EAST
AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

(C) Summary: In a meeting with Ambassador in early October, Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, who represents Jaffna in Parliament, stated that the GSL is likely to pursue a military solution to Sri Lanka's conflict, in part because "Sinhala ideology rejects power sharing." He expressed support for UN human rights monitors given the failure of Sri Lankan institutions to check human rights abuses. Ponnambalam urged the international community not to support the GSL's development program in the east because it would further the GSL objective of de-merging the north and east. The Ambassador countered that the merger was a question for future peace negotiations, while failure to engage now in the east could have highly destabilizing consequences for the Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese communities there. Ponnambalam said Tamilchelvian's September 24 statement urging the UN General Assembly to recognize the concept of the sovereignty of the Tamil people and provide opportunities similar to those given to the people of East Timor and Kosovo, was a recognition by the LTTE leadership that it cannot mobilize its people behind the idea of federalism. End summary.

GSL Interested in Military Solution

12. (C) Ambassador first welcomed Ponnambalam back after a prolonged absence out of the country due to security concerns. Ponnambalam said he was pleased to be back after more than a month in Europe with other TNA Parliamentarians. Asked for his views on the political situation, Ponnambalam expressed skepticism the GSL would pursue a political settlement. Their priority is a military solution, he said. He elaborated that President Rajapaksa has taken the ruling SLFP party toward the nationalist JVP platform to keep the JVP at bay and pre-empt UNP and other efforts to persuade them to vote against the Government budget.

13. (C) Ponnambalam expressed concern that the UNP had started to distance itself from its previous principled positions in favor of a negotiated solution, also to try to attract JVP support. For the climate to be conducive for negotiations, the country needs some sort of rapprochement between UNP and SLFP so they can work together, he said. He expressed appreciation for the Ambassador's public statements urging the two major parties to cooperate for the national interest.

14. (C) Ponnambalam noted it is a difficult time for Tamil moderates. He urged the international community to take steps to make it harder for GSL to pursue a military agenda. The Ambassador detailed the numerous statements he, U/S Burns and A/S Boucher had made in favor of a negotiated solution and the impossibility of a military solution. Ponnambalam urged the international community to think about targeted sanctions against members of the government.

Support UN Monitors

15. (C) Turning to human rights, Ponnambalam described the scope of the problem in familiar terms and expressed the TNA's support for the deployment of human rights monitors. He lamented the failure of Sri Lankan institutions to stop the violations and the insufficient votes the European Union and others have to pass a resolution in the Human Rights Council against Sri Lanka. The Ambassador provided Ponnambalam a copy of the statement issued by U/S Burns after his meeting with Foreign Minister Bogollogama on the human rights message given by the U/S.

Should Donors Help in the East?

16. (C) Ponnambalam said the international community should understand that supporting the GSL's development program in the east could be counterproductive because it would further the GSL objective of de-merging the north and east. The Ambassador explained that most donors believe that the sensitive issue of whether to re-merge the north and east can only be resolved through negotiations between the parties, including the Muslims. Since there was no immediate prospect

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for negotiations, it is important to work with the GSL to encourage a reconstruction and stabilization process in the east that could serve as a model and confidence builder for how the north might be managed as part of a future settlement. A failure to engage could have highly destabilizing consequences for all three communities in the east, he argued.

Tamilchelvan Statement on Tamil Sovereignty

17. (C) The Ambassador asked Ponnambalam why LTTE leader Tamilchelvan had made a statement on September 24 ahead of the UN General Assembly meetings urging the Assembly to "recognize the concept of the sovereignty of the Tamil people....and provide appropriate opportunities to the Tamil people to express their aspirations as have been given to the people of East Timor and Kosovo." Did not such statements feed into the hands of Sinhalese hard-liners who argue that the Government should not negotiate with the LTTE because the LTTE's objective is a separate state? Ponnambalam responded that the idea of federalism is in itself a recognition of Tamil sovereignty. Speaking frankly, he stated that the LTTE needs to mobilize its people, but they can't do that behind the idea of federalism.

Expectations for Heroes Day Speech?

18. (C) The Ambassador asked what the international community should expect from Prabakharan's Heroes Day speech at the end of November? Are predictions of a unilateral declaration of independence accurate? Ponnambalam dodged the question. He responded that the LTTE understands that if it ever returns to negotiations, it will have to transform itself and become pluralistic. The immediate problem it faces is the lack of a credible negotiating partner in the South because Sinhala ideology rejects power sharing, he said.

Comment and Bio Information

19. (C) Ponnambalam represents Jaffna as a member of the Tamil National Alliance in Parliament. He has unmatched political pedigree among Tamils. His grandfather founded and led the All Ceylon Tamil Congress, Sri Lanka's oldest Tamil party. His father Kumar Ponnambalam also led the ACTC and was assassinated in 2000. Although he is only 33 years old, Ponnambalam already is a respected Tamil leader. Despite many threats against him, he eschews security, opting instead to leave the country periodically.

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